

## MORBID CURIOSITIES: MUTILATION, EXHUMATION, AND THE FATE OF COLONIAL PAINTING

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It is late June 1878 on the Eastern Cape frontier in South Africa. A newspaper correspondent for the *Cape Mercury* sets out on a curious assignment. After riding for seven miles over lush grassland and through sumptuous wooded valleys, the journalist pauses on the ridge of a hill to record the following impression:

Much has been said of the Amatolas... but to my thinking, this portion of that range is by far the most beautiful, and from the high table lands, one gets a magnificent view of the country, including King William's Town, ... and Kei Road Station... stretching away mile after mile... with houses and farms dotted about here and there, adding a charm to the natural beauty of the landscape, while in the far distance the blue sea can be distinctly seen if the atmosphere is at all clear (*The Cape Mercury* 1878).

We all recognize this sort of description. It is a picturesque landscape, a view from an elevated vantage point of countryside generally agreed to be aesthetically pleasing by those in the know whose taste we admire. So far so good. But the next sentence in the report may come as something of a shock: "From Kei Road Station to Isidengi, is what Captain Landrey laughingly calls his hunting ground; and over the open space... between the Amatola Bush and the forests... there are a fair number of skeletons that attest the skill of the Frankfort Police"<sup>1</sup> (*The Cape Mercury* 1878). The reporter in question was in fact on his way to cover an event of singular importance: the burial of the great Xhosa leader Sandile. It may seem a little bizarre that, for him, the wooded glades of the Eastern Cape are, at one and the same time, a killing field and the subject of visual pleasure. However, this essay tries to show that there is a close, perhaps inevitable, connection between the mode of visual reference we call "landscape," on the one hand, and on the other, the fate of the human body.

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### LANDSCAPE AND EXHUMATION

It is now a widely accepted art historical principle that landscape effects depend inherently on violent forms of symbolic displacement. As Raymond Williams once put it, the displacement of villagers or the overwhelming of common ground by private ownership has "a hundred analogies in neo-pastoral painting and poetry, from which the facts of production [are] banished" (1985:125). "Where enclosure acts hedged the land," says Alan Liu in an equally influential line of argument, "acts of picturesque vision framed it in an endlessly repeatable enclosure of pure picturicity" (1989:94). It has also been convincingly shown that this squirearchical attitude to place, prospect, and labor had much to do with a developing Whig imaginary in eighteenth-century England. However, recent criticism has also concentrated on the ease with which such forms of scopic organization may be transported to the colonies.<sup>2</sup> The question remains though as to what contradictory extremes of violence the conventions of the picturesque can tolerate without significant fractures.

My task in this article is to show that "landscape" was always only one of several interlocking languages of visual reference operating in colonial South Africa. For nineteenth-century British settlers, military tourists, and itinerant artists, South Africa's Eastern Cape frontier zone was an area of extraordinary aesthetic appeal, reminiscent at first glance, with its undulating parkland, forested heights, and colourful *banditti*, of the Scottish Highlands.<sup>3</sup> Innumerable picturesque views were produced of the Amatolas, the Pirie, the coastal plains, and of fertile valleys studded with trim settler cottages. Yet the fact remains that between 1830 and 1880 this same terrain was the setting for some of the most savage close-combat in the history of colonial warfare. How is it possible that landscape, in the conventional sense, managed to avoid representing this catastrophic violence and painted out the horror that was literally embodied in bones and rotting corpses strewn about in plain view? Inevitably, this is a question that cannot be answered within the terms of landscape discourse alone. Instead, we need to broaden our inquiry and ask another question: How does the fact of extreme violence, epitomized by the problem of the mutilated and unburied corpse, express itself generally as an effect distributed across the whole field of representation in a given epoch?

My concern is with the relationship between trauma and representation in the Eastern Cape between 1850 and 1880, a relationship that expresses itself at one level in the fracturing of the picturesque landscape tradition. During this period, from the War of Mlanjeni (otherwise known as the Eighth Frontier War, 1850–1853) to the death of Chief Sandile in the War of Ngqayecibi (1877–1878), there is an increasing obsession on both sides with the problem of the corpse, or of exhumation.<sup>4</sup> Whereas for British metropolitan pictorial regimes, death could be subsumed within an elegiac landscape tradition, on the Eastern Cape frontier the entire domain of representation was changed by the conditions of chronic violence. In fact, in retrospect, it now appears that violence to the body, and especially acts of significant mutilation, became important as a brutal *means of communication* between sides. Given this terrifying reduction of meaning to the corporeal domain, the problem of memorializing the dead is exaggerated. As we shall see, instead of passing into memory or into the logic of mourning, the dead are frequently imagined to remain above ground, outside landscape, as signs that rot and smell.

#### A THEATRE OF WAR

Speaking of the relationship between power and performance in contemporary Northern Ireland, Allen Feldman suggests that “whoever seeks power must first control the apparatuses for production and mimesis of history as material spectacle” (1991:234). Now the colonial Eastern Cape was a similar sort of representational contact zone, a place where visual displays often prefigured more direct manifestations of power. As Crais, Peires, Mostert, and others have pointed out, the mid nineteenth-century regime of Governor Sir Harry Smith was characterized by spectacularly theatrical displays of power. Returning to the South African frontier in 1847 after victories at Aliwal in India, he quickly established his own style of epic visibility. Smith, it appears, liked to be seen, preferably on horseback. But he also resorted to various fantastical pantomimes of power, including dubbing himself *Inkhosi Inkhulu* [“great chief”], making use of elaborate props, such as imaginatively constructed staffs of office, and routine rituals of public humiliation in which Xhosa chiefs like Maqoma were forced to prostrate themselves to receive the weight of his boot on their necks (Peires 1989:5).

By the late 1840s, the Eastern Cape frontier had become a theatre of war in another sense as well; new modes of performativity were coming into being as a result of the increasing proximity between British troops and Mfengu irregulars. Underlying these changing modes of display was the British perception

that primitive consciousness was constituted around a totemic regard for the symbolic embellishment of the body. James Mackay, a newcomer to this strange theatricality, found himself at once appalled and attracted by the central role played by British officers in the “barbarous strange and dangerous” dances of the Fingo [Mfengu] levies.<sup>5</sup> These performances typically involved a wheeling display that appeared to advance menacingly on the white commander “as with the intention of burying their weapons in his body,” then “with a wild whoop... they would all instantaneously and unanimously wheel off” (Mackay 1871:3). The same *frisson* of interest is apparent in Thomas Baines’ depiction of Mfengu dancing.



Figure 1: Thomas Baines, “Kaffir War Dance in the Amatolas”

Here the cathartic energy of the dance, its libidinal abandonment, is redoubled by the framing context of the sublime mountain scenery. Semi-nakedness, and dark skin, is offset against the backdrop of the snowy peaks, an unusual sight generally in temperate South Africa, and therefore reminiscent perhaps also of “whiteness” as an imported, context-determining category.

So a first step in understanding the effects of violence on landscape is to examine the developing context of violent performativity in the early war years, a context that gives symbolically marked soldiers’ and natives’ bodies a greater semiotic prominence than they might have had in other circumstances. Our second maneuver must be to situate the language of landscape within the broader spatial and scopic regimes operative in the region by 1848.

The conclusion of the War of Mlanjeni marked the defeat and eastward displacement of the Ngqika Xhosa, under Chiefs Sandile and Maqoma, from the lush, picturesque fastnesses of the Kroomie and Amatolas into the narrow prison of Sir George Cathcart’s “Gaika [Ngqika] Location.”<sup>6</sup>



Figure 2: West, Map Showing the "State of the Frontier Since the Peace"

West's map reveals the dramatic contraction of Ngqika lands by the end of the Eighth Frontier War.

However, if we are to understand the role of *representation* in these contending land claims, it is also necessary to see "British Kaffraria" as a place where competing visual systems and literacies were mutually constitutive. The Amatolas, the area marked by sophisticated travelers as having maximum picturesque value, was sequestered and marked off as a "Royal Reserve."

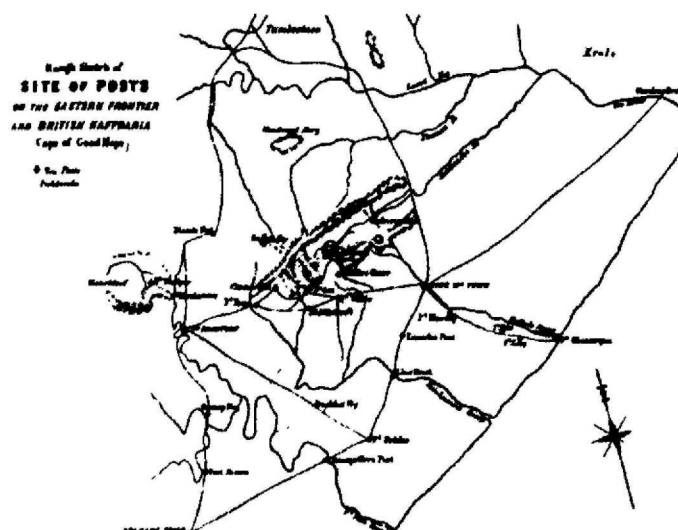


Figure 3: Sir George Cathcart, "Rough Sketch of Site of Posts on the Eastern Frontier and British Kaffraria"

This violent excision of territory is then supported by the introduction of a new disciplinary system of frontier forts installed by Cathcart. There is a family resemblance between this grid-like system that communicates messages between stations by heliograph, semaphore, and line of sight and the methods of trigonometrical survey. Very swiftly, the entire traditional heartland of the Xhosa became inscribed with a different spatial logic. Under Cathcart's command, Royal Engineers quartered the ground around each post in the Reserve with rayons that were two miles in diameter. These were military zones in which only certain structures capable of defensive reinforcement could be built, and the network of interlocking spaces allowed for the surveillance of the region and for controlling the influx of settlers (Coetzee 1995:503). Within the Royal Reserve, moreover, the Xhosa chiefly mode of production was destroyed, to be replaced, after removals and land clearances, by hut taxes, villagization, and the unequal distribution of land to collaborating elites (Crais 1992:197, Lewis 1991:250). Thus, there is a close association between land redistribution and the ability of military powers to disperse themselves as a surveillance force across the landscape.

What must be added to any account of power and representation in the Eastern Cape is the understanding that visual languages, like surveying as well as picturesque landscape conventions, were deployed in places that were already heavily inscribed with indigenous meaning. The order of local spatial understanding included the grounded knowledge of the Ngqika, for whom the Amatolas had always been a place of sublime beauty, rich with grave sites, pasturage, and intersecting transhumance routes, as well as deep historical understanding that was tied to a complex symbolic association of place and value that was regularly rehearsed in oral poetry.<sup>7</sup> This is the domain of socio-spatial experience and daily practice that Bourdieu calls *habitus*. It is a domain that is very difficult to map because it is regularly screened out by colonial reporting. Oral history offers an intriguing insight into its materiality, but even in the driest official despatches there is sometimes an ephemeral glimpse of it. One enclosure refers to news from an informer about Sandile's chagrin "that the whole of the land of [my] forefathers is dotted with the white man's houses and the white [surveyor's] flags."<sup>8</sup> Some decades later, the mark of this originary displacement appears in the oral poetry of *iimbongi* [praise poets] like S.E.K. Mqhayi (1914). Consider this transcription of a performance focused on Ntaba ka Ndoda, a peak in the Amatolas that was of central importance to the Xhosa understanding of locatedness:

*Ndiswel' imilomo, ntaba yakowethu,  
Situlo seenyawo zo Thix' akowethu,  
Buso bhukhangele ngasentshonalanga,  
Bubethwa yimitha yokumka kwelanga.  
Ngendicula ngawe phantsi kolu viko  
Ngendihamba kuwe kule nkcithakalo*

Words fail me, our beloved mountain,  
Place of the feet of our people's God,  
With your face inclined to the West,  
To catch the rays of the setting sun.  
I should be singing about you in my bondage,  
I should take refuge in you at this time of disintegration.<sup>9</sup>

Any understanding of the role of representation in late nineteenth-century colonial exchanges has to proceed from the understanding that the mountainous terrain of the Amatolas was a place of heavily contested symbolic investment with contradictory narratives about embodiment, location, and ultimately, the representational relationship between figure and ground.

### THE RETURN OF "MR. GORE"

The character of violence during the War of Mlanjeni owed much to the type of terrain in which battles were waged. In almost every case — and in sharp contrast to the later regimental tactics of the Zulu military state — successful Xhosa attacks involved swift guerrilla raids, striking from forested ravines and the impenetrable Fish River acacia thorn bush. Naturally, such tactics presented a major problem of visibility to the British. With a largely invisible enemy who stabbed or shot from dense cover then melted away, the most successful countermeasure was the ungentlemanly habit of "skirmishing." The settler Thomas Stubbs left a dramatic description of this face-to-face mode of close combat: "You there sit. You hear them coming on perhaps humming a tune. You see them and almost look in their eyes and have to give the signal for their death warrant" (Maxwell and McGeogh 1978:155). By this stage in military history, set piece battles had long been abandoned, giving way in the Eastern Cape context to frenzied, close quarter exchanges, the equivalent of modern firefights. This is the period during which colonial landscape is overtaken by the problem of surveillance.

Fighting at close quarters, British and Xhosa found themselves in ghastly proximity. Nonetheless, with their wounded strewn about them and their dead piled on gun carriages, British colonial soldiers struggled to find evidence of the harm inflicted on an elusive foe: "Between the rocks lay dots of gore, pieces of flesh, and much blood was seen, but the wounded or dead bodies had been conveyed to their rear in the mountain forests above" (Mackay

1871:24). Out of this savage guerrilla war which carried no visible British success, a new obsession with blood as a signifier or evidential trace emerges. Harriet Ward, one of the most racist settler commentators during the War of the Axe, was particularly intrigued by the evidence of spilt blood. In one episode, her outrage at supposed Xhosa atrocities is surpassed only by her anger at enemy warriors achieving command of the tactical heights above, "brandishing [a captured] sword on the top of the hill" (1848:213). This theatrical appearance reverses the normal order of visibility in which the landscape is overlooked from a prospect position. Other officers in her narrative are praised for retaining their weapons and reappearing victorious, drenched with evidence of their success: "Sir Harry Darrell, and Mr. Gore, 7th, returned with their hands imbued in Kaffir blood, and their swords bent and broken" (Ward 1848:275). Egged on by the settler townsfolk, the officers who were returning from obscure battles had the mark of their success read in the smudges, stains, and blood smears visible on their uniforms.

Ward's *Five Years in Kaffirland* anticipates much of the somatic imagery that became widespread during the War of Mlanjeni. Tellingly, her narrative is full of horrified imaginings about the fate of captured officer's corpses, some of which she says are cut into pieces by the enemy and "hung about the bush" (1848:213). A general history of the body in this period must confront these perceptions. By mid-century, it now appears, a violent contact zone had been established in which the body itself, torn apart, limbs sundered or mutilated, had become a significant means of communication between warring sides.<sup>10</sup>

### SIGNIFICANT MUTILATIONS

Accounts of the mutilation of corpses and the torture of prisoners on both sides were so widespread in South Africa in the 1850s that they ceased having individual meaning. Instead, they become part of a general paranoid-schizoid logic of wounding and revenge. By the time of the Waterkloof campaign, reports of catastrophic mutilation had become so common that it was as though all meaning was becoming limited to the signifying field of the body. At one point, Mackay comments on this contracted field of meaning visible in the bizarre attire of the settler mercenaries: "Around the hats of each of these valiant irregulars was written, in flaming letters, the word 'Extermination'" (1871:148). This brutal signification, in which language ceases to function as a transparency and in which words are worn close to the body as though to assure their referentiality, has its equivalent in the semiology of corpse mutilation. Two pages after Mackay's description of the settler's hats, there is a horrific description of the body of Lance Corporal Turnbull, "with his hands cut off, and

his trunk placed upright against a mud wall, with the head lying on the outstretched arms" (1871:150). This is a message meant for the colonial troops. However, the act is then revenged for Mackay some miles further up the Waterkloof where, he says, "we had complete *satisfaction* for that barbarous scene in witnessing the large number of corrupt bodies of Kafirs" (1871:150, my emphasis). The word "satisfaction" seems an unusual one to find in this context, yet it is entirely appropriate in terms of the logic of wounding and the semiotics of blood that held sway at this time. To find "satisfaction" in the bloated enemy remains recalls the affective economy that has been set in place, in which the mutilation of a comrade leaves a stored up aggression, only to be discharged when an equivalent revenge is exacted. Of course "satisfaction" also refers to the logic of the duel, an older order of face-to-face violence tied to the blood semiotics of an antiquated officer class. Once again, it seems, the colonial theatre of war forces an imaginary regression to pre-modern orders of violence.

I am suggesting that, during the War of Mlanjeni, it is possible to see an entirely different form of bodily reference emerging, one that affected the whole domain of representation and the relationship between figure, ground, and history in landscape painting. Put simply, the extreme violence of guerrilla warfare, epitomized by narratives about the significant mutilation of the body, undermined the ability of genres such as picturesque landscape description to keep separate the force of historical contradiction and the aesthetics of potential land ownership. For many, it was as though a pre-Enlightenment logic of fetishism and similitude had returned. Two famous episodes exemplified this violent regression: the decapitation of James Brownlee and the torture and murder of Bandmaster Hartung. One anonymous officer's report in the *United Services Magazine* repeats the widespread rumor that "the savages had cut off [Browlee's] head in order to take it to their Prophet Mlanjeni" (Anon. 1851:34). In wreaking this terrible revenge, the Xhosa mistook James Brownlee for his brother Charles, arrogantly installed by Harry Smith as "Gaika Chief" in Sandile's place. But the commentator's horror, of course, is not simply at the act itself but the fetishistic transformation of the head into a use value. The same spectre of fetishism (the animating worship of part objects), and of cannibalism, manifests itself most fully in the narrative around Bandmaster Hartung who, in the spectacularly embellished version of an informant's report, is made to drink his own blood and has "a portion of his body... offered... to him for food" (Mackay 1871:75). His torture is made all the more awful, it is said, by the dramatic presence of Ngqika women who "danced around him, drowning his cries with their wild yells

of delight" (Mackay 1871:75). This association of torture, dismemberment, and emasculation is one to which we will return later.

By themselves, such episodes do not do much to threaten the conventional forms of landscape representation translated from Britain to the colonial provinces. After all, as Alan Liu has pointed out, some decades earlier there was widespread reliance by the British conservative press on similar reports of cannibalistic excesses and the bizarre display of corpses during the September Massacres of the French Revolution (1989:151–152). This did little to alter the landscape conventions of Romantic poetry. In South Africa, however, violence insinuates itself into the entire system of representation, posing a significant threat to ideas of aesthetic order or convention. An abiding fear for many military diarists and painters in South Africa is that the principle of sympathetic magic apparently underlying these acts of significant mutilation is beginning to affect the colonial forces themselves. Several British writers, for instance, comment on how all linguistic principles of equivalence seem to be breaking down in the face of a different sort of archaic logic. One interesting meditation on the collapse of a larger symbolic order may be found in Thomas Baines' *Journal* (Kennedy 1964). Significantly, the painter tells of how difficult it is to maintain the system of monetary exchange on the Frontier and that Khoikhoi will not accept the principle of equivalence between different types of coinage. This is followed in the very next paragraph by an amazing anecdote, "illustrative," he says, "of the sweetness of revenge" (Kennedy 1964:291). Riding through a swarm of locusts, a burgher is struck in the eye by one of the armoured creatures. Baines describes how the rider picks up the stunned beast and, "having wiped his smarting eyelids, [he] drew a pin from the corner of his waistcoat and thrust it through the body of the insect" (Kennedy 1964:291). Each time his eye pains him, the man repeats the punishment.

Baines tells this story to make a point about the decline of civilized logic and the spread, through the frontier zone, of a sort of fetishistic understanding. I would put it rather differently. Extreme violence, I suggest, engenders its own communicative field, centered on the body and the order of significant mutilation, wounding, and counterwounding. For the Ngqika Xhosa, however, the British had long been associated with spectacular forms of public wounding, in particular with the practice of taking decapitated trophy heads. Harry Smith's presiding over the mutilation of Chief Hintsa's body was one of the great infamies of the period, and several colonial writers admitted to the fact that mercenary forces rarely spared Xhosa prisoners. One terrible account by Stephen Lakeman recalls the fact that some mer-

cenaries were specialist executioners, one carrying "a broken reaping hook, to cut the throats of women and children we had taken prisoner" (Lakeman 1880:94).<sup>11</sup>

Recent attempts by communities in the Eastern Cape to have the bones of chiefs Maqoma, Hintsa, and Sandile returned or reinterred reveal the fact that, in popular Xhosa historical understanding, the leaders of the period were all believed to have been decapitated.<sup>12</sup> Justification for this albeit exaggerated understanding of historical violence is not hard to find. Jeff Peires (1989) points to a grotesque episode in Lakeman in which troops prepare skulls for export as phrenological specimens, "stirring round and round the heads in [a] seething boiler, as though they were cooking black-apple dumplings" (Lakeman 1880:95). That the export of body parts was widespread is also evidenced in the casual tone of this letter from Frederick Rex to his father George on 19 May 1835: "Brother John's Kafir head will not be forgotten nor Caroline's Kaross. Ask Brother John to write me the best place of curing a Kafir skeleton quite perfect" (Long 1947:171). What is at stake here, therefore, is a modernizing rhetoric that speaks, on the one hand, about the dangerous influence of archaic logics of wounding and mutilation and, on the other, is prepared to accept the traffic of trophy heads from colony to metropolitan center in the name of medico-scientific exchange or the new language of the souvenir (Greenblatt 1992:39, Morris 1996:67–80).

The Eighth Frontier War had its origins in the dispossession of Xhosa communities and the destruction of their means of subsistence. In addition, this meant the destabilizing of their entire symbolic domain of spatial meaning, focused on kraals and homesteads (the *umzi*), the chiefly control over grazing rights and cattle, and grave markers. Nowhere was this conflict more intense than in the forested western region called the Waterkloof, a densely wooded mountainous region west of Fort Beaufort. The Waterkloof campaign was one of the bloodiest Eastern Cape theatre, dramatically documented in Noel Mostert's *Frontiers* and Jeff Peires' *The Dead Will Arise*. Its character was determined by the nature of the terrain, the combined skill of the Xhosa guerrillas and their Khoikhoi allies, and the blind stupidity of the British officers. In fact, the Waterkloof was a sort of Nemesis. The problem of surveillance that the British faced in the forested Amatolas and in the impenetrable Fish River bush reached dramatic proportions here, with conditions that included thick primary forest, huge trees, thorny underbrush, and precipitous terrain. For guerrillas, it was ideal terrain; for the likes of George Cathcart, it was a nightmarish last refuge of the most dangerous elements on the frontier because it consisted of "dens and lurking places for large bands of lawless, well-armed and

desperate marauders... vagrant Tambookies, rebel Hottentots and active and enterprising Gaikas" (GH 1852:23/21, quoted in Coetzee 1995:493). "Mount Misery," as the Kroome mountain at the head of the Waterkloof came to be known, was the site of the most violent colonial conflict prior to the Crimea. But it was here, too, that another threshold was crossed for, from this time on, the landscape conventions that enable the management of white and black bodies in picturesque settings were no longer so easily operative.

For the Waterkloof Ngqika, British corpses came to serve an unusually specific metaphoric purpose. When James Mackay's men turned away from a battle site after burying their dead, they were confronted by irate Ngqika warriors. "When they saw us in the valley below, their anger knew no bounds, and dragging out the dead bodies which we had placed in graves, they flung them into the air, and over deep precipices after us" (1871:28). For the Xhosa, we may speculate, burial of the enemy dead signified a form of violent land claim, a pollution of the entire habitus so recently theirs and the ground taken by violent dispossession. Ripping unshriven corpses out of the ground, denying them rest or dignity, turning them into stinking signs of the offensive presence of colonialism became a macabre form of symbolic resistance. For both sides, moreover, the uprooted corpse was a sign of emasculation; to gaze upon the bloated, uncoffined body of the male warrior was to see it marked by defeat, or as feminized. In the case of the rebel Hermanus, this was exaggerated by the corpse being apparelled in "a lady's black crêpe bonnet" when displayed in the market place for the townsfolk of Fort Beaufort (Mackay 1871:43).

## OFFICERS' REMAINS

It was in the Waterkloof that the 74th Highland Regiment, supported by some Mfengu mercenaries and cavalry from the Cape Mounted Rifles and led by a foolish newcomer named Colonel Fordyce, attempted a series of textbook regimental attacks against an enemy who knew the terrain intimately. British troops were plucked into the bush by unseen hands, picked off by sharpshooters, and finally decimated by a hail of bullets from the vantage points above the slippery slopes.

Another remarkable feature of the battle was the expertise of the Khoikhoi deserters from the Cape Mounted Rifles who, working with the Xhosa, according to Noel Mostert, were able to decode British signals and bugle calls, intercept dispatches, and concentrate their fire on the officers (Mostert 1992:1120–21). From all accounts, this was a war critically served by the advantage of literacy.

A measure of desperation seems to have possessed the British officers. On the 6th of November

1851, Fordyce was shot while standing in plain sight waving his cap, trying to direct the movements of troops below (Mostert 1992:1125). A higher percentage of officers died in this exchange than at any other time in the Frontier wars, a fact that apparently caused considerable personal distress to Queen Victoria.

Thomas Baines' remarkable painting, *The Death of Colonel Fordyce*, records this most lamented episode of the Waterkloof campaign. More generally though, the painting concerns the relationship between trauma and vision, and it allows us to make several general observations about the comparative history of visibility.



Figure 4: Thomas Baines, "The Death of Colonel Fordyce"

Structurally, the work is organized around three loose groups of people on the forest edge, with a background scene of troops and armaments moving in regimental array in a field of light. As we have seen, the ostensible historical subject of the painting is the tragic aftermath of the Waterkloof battle. But we are faced with something of a mystery. It is not at first entirely clear which of the wounded figures is Colonel Fordyce. The most likely contender seems to be the feminized figure on the left, which is cloaked in a white death sheet, yet similar scenes are repeated elsewhere. In a sense, then, the historical subject is distributed across the painting, not as one individual but in the death of several commissioned officers, with men of lower ranks ministering to them.

Because the historical subject is decentered, our attention is drawn instead to repeated motifs in the representation of figures. Almost without exception, the foreground figures seem to be drained of energy, dejected while the wounded figures at the forest edge are evidence of the battle only shortly past. Most of the uniformed soldiers appear to be exhausted or dulled by events. Collapsed against trees, heads bent to knees, or standing silently around wounded officers or subalterns, they are the very picture of defeat. Thus, the body bent under the weight of grief, ex-

haustion, or depression, becomes the dominant figural motif.

Considered as a historical painting, therefore, the work calls up an imaginary sequence of events: the forest edge of the battle only shortly past; the future is represented by the regrouping troops in the light-filled distance. In a sense, too, the passage of the eye from dark foreground to the narrative elements in the distance vaguely recalls the reading conventions of Claudian landscape. However, this is not a landscape work in the conventional sense. For one thing, there has been an important paradigm shift in the visual codes of mid-century colonial painting. Twenty years earlier, the poet Thomas Pringle, farming some distance west of the Waterkloof, was able to speak poetically of wandering through the countryside, stopping to read Coleridge with cultivated friends (1971[1834]). That is, whereas in the 1830s or 1840s it was still possible to sustain some notion of the picturesque landscape circuit operating as a political principle in Africa, by 1850 landscape representation had become far more directly tied to the topographical concerns of the military expedition.

In the painting we are considering, the military is represented at its most vulnerable, as it regroups its forces and tends to the wounded and the dead. References to mortality are distributed across the scene. Superficially, the work recalls a favorite theme of eighteenth century historical painting — the sentimental death of the hero.<sup>13</sup> Unlike the historical painters before and after him, however, Thomas Baines is not able to focus on conventional ideas of mourning or death-bed veracity. In an epoch that Ariès has described as "the age of the beautiful death," when presence at the death bed "is an opportunity to witness a spectacle that is both comforting and exalting" (1981:473), no such comfort attends the traumatizing experience of the colonial battlefield. Trauma, not mourning or the call of duty, is the central subject of Baines' work. For the expedition painter, the individual heroic moment has been consumed by the more general understanding of military defeat, of the body broken and threatened.

An examination like this shows us the strengths and weaknesses of a comparative understanding of the visual field such as that advanced in Crary's *Techniques of the Observer*. Even if we admit that Baines worked within a specific representational epoch, this is not identical to European discourses precisely because of its colonial context. Crary's understanding of what he sees as a profound mid-nineteenth-century shift in "the conditions and forces that defined or allowed the formation of a dominant model of what an observer was" (1990:7) does not take into account the complex articulation of European modes of visibility and indigenous resistance on the imperial periphery. By the time of the Eighth

Frontier War, the link between landscape prospect, meditative consciousness, and land ownership could no longer be presumed. Instead, the idea of the picturesque landscape circuit had been overwhelmed by the problem of surveillance. Older, still basically Claudian conventions had been replaced by an ideological association of fringing darkness, race, and menace, and in Baines' frontier works height becomes associated with tactical advantage.



Figure 5: "The 74th Regiment Advancing to Attack at Waterkloof"

High above the regiments, the mountain fastnesses are no longer simply emblematic of the sublime. Instead, they contain the enemy who holds the commanding heights, and a sense of being watched from on high or from fringing bush is tangible. In such military paintings, the invisible scanning eye of the implied observer in landscape is fixed and focused as a subject in the work; invisibility is given over to the camouflaged Other. The officers in the painting desperately scan the slopes with a telescope. Thus, "landscape" has given way to an idea of occupied terrain in which the returning gaze of the enemy is felt in a sense of exposure, of vulnerability, in the hairs on the back of the neck.

Another reason that Death cannot become a subject for meditation in *The Death of Colonel Fordyce* is that, as we have seen, the white body on the frontier becomes vulnerable when exposed to other eyes. Let us look at the work again. All the British subjects are slumped exhausted, and yet there is one figure alive to the scene, one who is dangerously close to epitomizing the dominant viewing consciousness — the black observer on the right. He stands deeply attentive, alert, full of febrile energy, in sharp contrast to the white figure collapsed at his feet. Now a more conventional art historical approach to this figure would be to "read it" for stereotypical features. I am more interested in how Baines is forced to manage the contradictions around the fact of a black subject viewing an exposed and vulnerable white body, a procedure that is visible in the handling

of color and line. The Mfengu irregular is the only figure with an attentive, physical address to the landscape. His body is twisted, repeating the serpentine motif of the insistent liana above him. Significantly, one hand rests on the large tree alongside, and a tactile relationship between body and forest context is established. In other words, this is an instance of what I would call *provisional subjecthood*, a moment when, for discursive or ideological reasons, a figure is temporarily precipitated out of a background mass, as though by brief metamorphosis. At the same time, we are led to believe that this attention the native witness exhibits is not something that speaks of self-conscious agency; instead, it is a type of voyeurism. The condition of the figure, in other words, is that of the native subject as landscape, always half emerging from the background foliage as a watcher or a witness, soon to subside back into the primary visual ground.

This death scene confirms for us the fact that the body itself has a different history in non-metropolitan contexts. In colonial South Africa, the field of somatic reference is highly unstable, as is evident in the deep fears around the fate of the white body after death and the problem of the body in mid-century landscape painting and poetry. Yet it is precisely because landscape is both a genre that structures metaphors of visual dominance and figure-ground relationships, as well as being a medium for the transmission of value, that these contradictions are so interesting.

## METEMPSYCHOSES

We are faced with a paradox: while the entire eastern Cape and British Kaffraria became, after 1850, a theatre for warfare of unprecedented brutality, this was accompanied by sharply increased metropolitan interest in picturesque frontier settings. During this period, we find the Amatola basin routinely referred to as "the Highlands of Caffraria," despite the fact that the area around the Keiskamma was littered with the bones of Xhosa troops. Baines' military paintings reflect these contradictions directly. Where, though, in more conventional landscape representations, do we find evidence of this displaced violence? After the War of Mlanjeni, increasing numbers of picturesque travelers make detours to inspect forsaken military memorials and sites of past battles. Graves were a particular attraction. At the post known as "Bailie's Grave," Robert Wilmot was overcome with a feeling of such suicidal dread that, in his journal, he remarks that, for the sake of the poor souls stationed there, "knives and neckties ought to be removed" (1984[1856]:48). Contemplating another officer's grave at Fort Peddie, he exclaims: "Poor fellow, he did his best to keep up the old name and his memory is yet green in the land. I wish his tomb was more

honoured" (1984[1856]:62). Strangely similar contradictions appear in what are often taken to be Thomas Bowler's most picturesque colonial views.

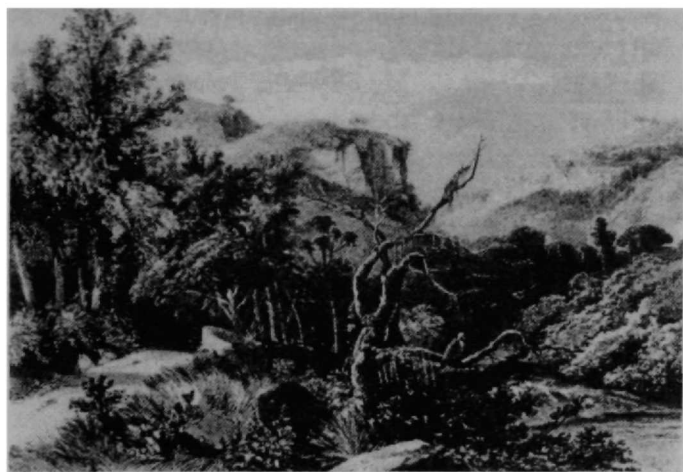


Figure 6: Thomas Bowler, "The Boma Pass"

This lithograph recalls the late eighteenth-century style that came to be known as the "reformed" picturesque, with its concentration on rough or stark vegetation and sublime vistas in the style of Salvator. Two unusual elements disturb the pictorial conventions. First, there is the fact that this is the Boma Pass, site of a famous early massacre in the Eighth Frontier War where British troops found the bodies of their comrades carefully laid out on the road as though spelling out a terrible message. Secondly, this painting shows how conventional landscape can represent historical memories only very awkwardly for, as Wordsworth was fond of declaring, historical reference is "injurious to the [topographical] effect" (Farington 1920:129, Liu 1989:80). In other words, there is a tension here between the organization of the scene as a vista, with a road which directs the eye, a stark object of foreground interest, and so on, and the subtle insistence of historical memory. In the fracture between these two imperatives, new phenomena appear. Past force is hinted at indirectly in the rocks below, which remind of scattered tombstones, and vultures that come to brood over the scene are harbingers of the return of the past horror into the present. Violent history, in other words, can only take its place in landscape in another guise, as a sort of metempsychosis in which traumatic memories come to be embodied in other creatures.

A second example of the strained presence of history in the picturesque present is the following:



Figure 7: Thomas Bowler, "Macoma's Den, Waterkloof"

Here we have a general view of the Waterkloof in a representation that is heavily allusive to the syntax of the sublime — extreme mountain precipices and qualities of beauty and terror exemplified by violent weather. But these are effects that can no longer be channeled into the production of an Enlightened viewing subject. Rather, once again, the vultures call up memories of historical tragedy, and the lightning that breaks upon the distant kloof is as much a metonymic signifier of the uncontrollable power of the Xhosa leader Maqoma himself, as representing an effect on the Romantic consciousness of the viewer.

One way of thinking about these paintings is that they attempt to work within the language of landscape elegy, but they come across the contradictions inherent in the idea of the colonial memorial. In fact, they repeat certain contradictions inherent in the idea of the colonial grave. A grave, remember, is both a site and a sign. Epitaphs gesture both downwards, to the mortal remains of the interred, and outwards, to the presumed attachment of a community that will continue to venerate this place. In the English topographical poetry tradition, which leads directly into the Romantic elegy, graves are frequently a significant place of pause for the wanderer. In Gray's *Elegy*, perhaps the most famous example of this form, the twilight meditations of a wanderer turn to focus on the deep history of the organic community in which the memory of the local dead is vested. But the condition of the *colonial* grave is very different. Without occasional attendants, it is as though the grave becomes an aporia, an unnameable zone of contradiction where the brute fact of colonial dispossession communicates with the language of landscape. Without mourners, without the association of an indigenous community, the corpse truly returns to earth, to the condition of the native, of the body as landscape. For this reason, perhaps, in many of the

picturesque views of far-flung British graves published in the *Illustrated London News*, the lonely burial mounds frequently have attendant British soldiers, with bent heads, posed beside them.



Figure 8: "Graves in the Winterberg"

Perhaps the most revealing staging of mourning effects may be found in Bowler's picturesque view of the actual site of Fordyce's death.

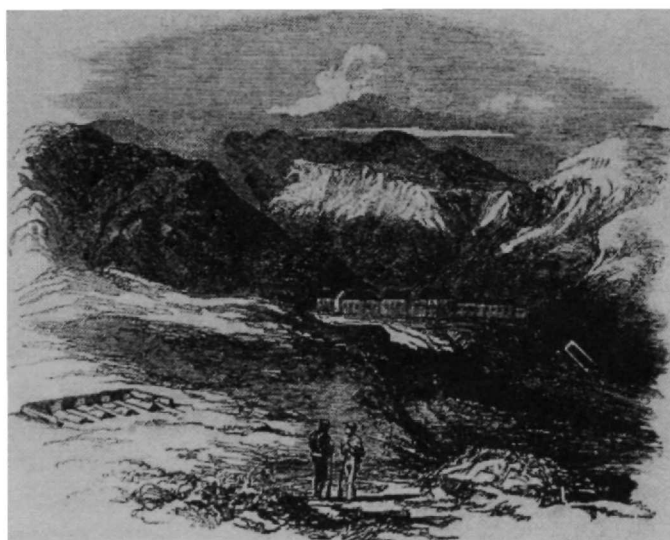


Figure 9: Thomas Bowler, "Mount Misery"

Metropolitan audiences would have known of this infamous site. However, the painter who returns to mourn can find no trace of the catastrophic event or its heroic subject. In the face of this complete erasure, what is required is a philosophical sleight of hand, what literary students in an earlier age were taught to call the "pathetic fallacy," by which Nature appears responsive to human emotion. Here the inquisitive deer (animals close to the hearts of Whig landowners) become the silent, attentive mourners, carrying with them some primitive consciousness of the past for which no actual witnesses remain.

Colonial painters cannot tolerate the idea that history works to erase all memory of the regimental dead, especially those of the officer class. But because pseudo-historical landscapes like Bowler's cannot use elegiac conventions (they cannot fabricate a community of mourners in a neighboring shire who will visit the site), they are forced to press other metonymic elements into the service of mourning.

Towards the end of the century, the novelist Thomas Hardy became profoundly aware of the para-

dox of the colonial cadaver. Several of his Boer War poems are obsessed with the idea of the British corpse, its spirit unshriven, in foreign ground: "South of the Line, inland from far Durban,/ A mouldering soldier lies — your countryman./ Awry and doubled up are his gray bones,/ And on the breeze his puzzled phantom moans/ Nightly to clear Canopus" (1972:82).<sup>14</sup> These bodies, tossed unceremoniously into the unwelcoming earth, reveal the very precarious dependency between power and spectacle. Finally, mourning is not possible for the soldier who has no intrinsic links with the country, where friends who do not know the landscape as intimately as the locals eventually forget which thorn tree it is that marks his grave and foreign constellations wheel ominously overseas.

A dramatic example of this problem came with the shocking death of the Prince Imperial in Zululand, an event that is recorded with obsessional frequency in the European press. Consider this popular image:

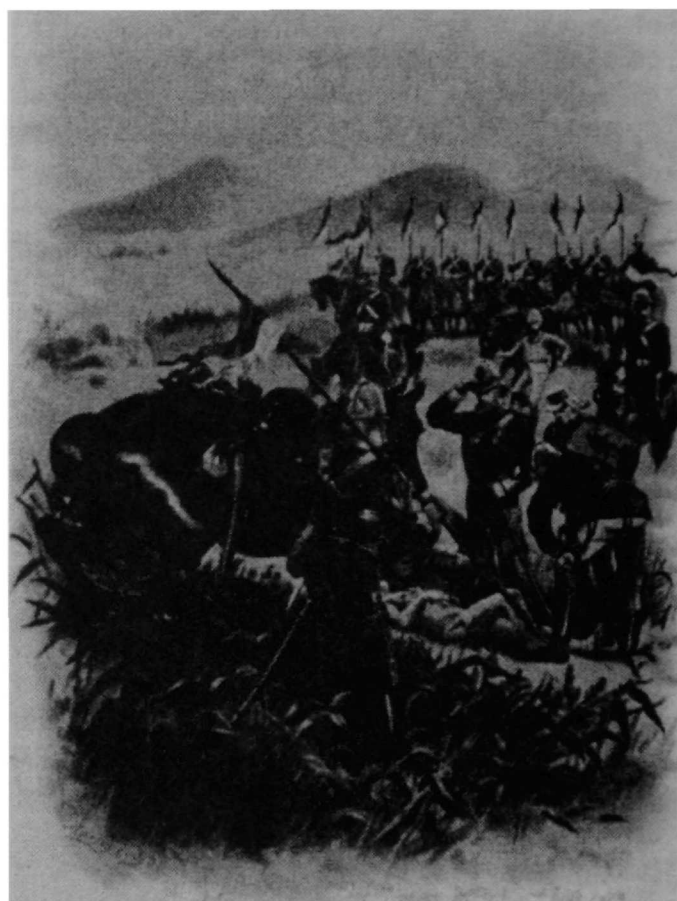


Figure 10: "Finding the Body of the Prince Imperial"

At first glance, this colored lithograph appears rather different from the images we have been examining. It is illustrative, like a poster or a book plate; the detail is gathered away from the page edge in a sort of roundel, giving the effect of a telescopic view, a magic lantern slide, or of vision clearing. Whether deliberately or not, however, the work speaks about historical trauma. Visible shock at the terribly wounded corpse in a state of rigor mortis is evident,

but not where one expects it. The closest soldier is off balance, reactive, steadying his horse; his tilted lance creates an unusual diagonal in symmetry with the awful stiffness of the corpse's right leg. However, he, who might have told so much by his expression, has his back to us. Instead, the horse is the bearer of primitive effect. The only consciousness to react dramatically to the traumatized cadaver, it starts back, hind leg raised, eyes bulging in fright. Across the rest of the picture, affect is dispersed, transformed, and reconstituted. The person closest to the body appears headless, facial expressions obliterated by the wraith of steam from the horse's nostrils. Like ripples, the shock effects diminish in force the further away from the central object one goes. The figures bending in from the right have an apparently clinical interest in the corpse, while the officer who faces us directly bottles up his emotions in a salute. The horror is contained in its entirety by the bracketing pair of mounted soldiers and the background line of soldiers in full regimental array.

This image is clearly meant for audiences that are shocked at the news of the mutilation and then disappearance of the royal body, an audience that is still reeling at the idea of Britain's catastrophic losses at the battle of Isandlwana some months earlier.<sup>15</sup> The fact that this corpse, punctured by seventeen assegai wounds, was in fact a *royal* body — a symbolic vessel which combines, to paraphrase Louis Marin, elements of the sacramental, the historical, and the juridico-political — significantly magnifies the shock of the event (1988:123). Thus the lithograph records an attempt to return dignity to the violated corpse by staging a colorful regimental recovery. Moreover, despite the fact that the body is being found long after the death, the characteristic blood signifier is again present as a landscape element. In the hand colored original, foreground foliage is heavily tinted, with spear-shaped leaves apparently dipped in blood. It is as though there has been a sudden, unnatural blooming of gore to mark the spot of this special death on an otherwise blank field, anticipating the arrival of mourners who will bear the body away to its proper rest. Before the rescuers arrive, in other words, the foliage bleeds in witness to the horrible deed, and there is consequently *no time before or after* when the memory of the royal death is not marked upon the land.

Ironically, the problem of remembering the white body in the colonies is eventually managed through a technological innovation — wet plate photography. This, more than anything, provided a means of recording the sites of heroic death and of transmitting them to a metropolitan audience. Thus, the insub-

stantial merging of British identity and foreign terrain is prevented, and the body is, as it were, maintained as a subject even after death. For there truly to be "some corner of a foreign field that is forever England" it is necessary that there also be observers who can testify to the virtues of dead heroes. Indigenous watchers do not usually constitute this sort of subject category.

There is a photograph album in the South African Library that records the building of an official monument to the Prince Imperial at the site of his death. One image in the sequence of four is particularly strange, for it appears to stage for the camera a repentant group of Zulu warriors joining their white bosses to salute the newly constructed grave.



Figure 11: "Monument to the Prince Imperial"

Through this theatrical deployment of native stagehands (figures who are nevertheless not subjects), the grave is sustained as the central point of historical significance in an imaginary landscape. I should insist on one last point here: photography solves the problem of the colonial grave precisely because we interpret this image very differently from the way we might interpret an elegiac poem or painting. It is indexical and seems to have the aura of an actual event. The photographic frame apparently gives a representative sample; it is not conventional in the sense of the painterly frame. Furthermore, the relationship of figure and ground is also markedly different in photography. In part, the magic of the captured moment is due to the new ethnographic power of the photographer, as though having the ability to command human subjects to perform their actions in a domain of typicality and real time. Thus it is that Zulu workers appear to join spontaneously in paying homage to the great man.

Ironically, this same urge towards ethnographic realism seems to underlie the photographic representation of a drawing of Chief Sandile's corpse shortly after his death in 1878.



Figure 12: Sandile Lying in State

If we had any doubts about the persistence of the risen body as a sign in late colonial South Africa, this should quell them. This is not simply a photograph; it is a *carte de visite* from the Eastern Cape, a decorous announcement that might as easily have been dropped through a letter slot with other representations of distant picturesque hills or green valleys with aloes.

We need to be alert to the wider context of this death. It has been my argument that between 1850 and 1880 the convention of the meditative South Africa landscape prospect became fractured. Out of these fissures, the truth of the force behind any landscape act rises, embodied in the image of the mutilated, unburied corpse. As we have seen, visibility was a key problem for the colonial forces in the eastern Cape. With savage close-quarter fighting and the skill with which Xhosa guerrillas melted away into the thick bush, a peculiar kind of colonial fascination descended upon the image of the enemy dead. For all the propaganda against him, Sandile was a highly skilled leader and the last of the rebel Ngqika chiefs to be actively defiant of British rule. Furthermore, his elusiveness, in matters of statesmanship and in battle, stood in sharp contrast to the fact that he was very visibly marked: he had a withered left leg.<sup>16</sup> Sandile's demise, like the Prince Imperial, was unobserved. It was behind the scenes, in thick bush, where he was struck perhaps by a stray bullet, the body being left to rot before being pointed out to the British military authorities by an informer.

Thus the problem of visibility followed Sandile to the grave. This portrait (and it is a portrait in the generic sense) tries to quell colonist's fears of his rising up. It identifies him by the feature of the withered leg, and yet it is utterly unlike the representation of the corpse circulated in the London newspaper *The Graphic* of the same year.

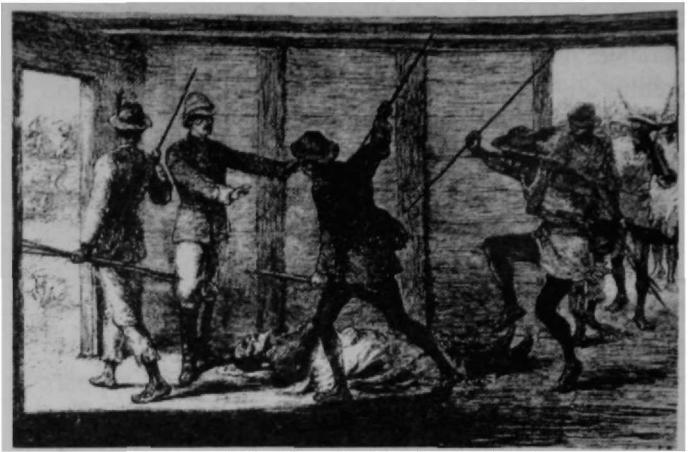


Figure 13: Fingoes Viewing the Body of Chief Sandile

In stark contrast to this newspaper illustration, the visiting card image is for local circulation, relying on the understanding that this is a truthful, eye-witness depiction of the body's actual state upon discovery.

Particular attention is paid to the skeletonized right arm, a terrible damage to the chief's corpse that anticipates the revenge of the grave. In this significant mutilation, this macabre realism, we have come full circle in our understanding of trauma and pictorial truth in the Eastern Cape. In the end, this pathetically reduced form speaks, not so much about the scavengers that have worked away at the abandoned cadaver, as to the insatiable settler urge to keep things visible. In this local appropriation of an image, Sandile's body remains forever above ground in the settler Imaginary. The body is, so to speak, permanently exhumed, perpetually half decayed. As a visiting card, the image therefore participates in the logic of revenge, celebrating the humiliation of the flesh and the ultimate loneliness of the leader who struck at the colony from his invisible lair.

Like all pictorial visiting cards, the one before us is meant to invoke a shared aesthetic in the name of friendship or business. Ambiguously, though, this is also a *portrait* of the dead. Jacques Derrida has recently spoken of the common principle underlying all acts of mourning and all portraits as being that of a recognition of the power of death. "The greatest force is to be seen in the infinite renunciation of force, in the absolute interruption of force by the without force" (1996:176). Proper mourning, to put it another way, is that which fails well, acceding to the power of death. In the circulation of the Sandile image, we find an attempt to escape this principle. By distributing an image of the Chief's mutilated body, punishing its memory, it is as though the gentry of Grahamstown wished to abrogate to themselves the awful power of the grave, the power of mortification.

That the poignant image of this unburied enemy leader could perform so domestic a function as to announce a visit is evidence, finally, of how far trauma had penetrated into the social fabric of settler communities. Of course, one of the characteristic symptoms of trauma is compulsive repetition, a return to the originary wound.<sup>17</sup> Circulated superstitiously between acquaintances, war veterans, and friends, this portrait of Sandile's mutilation shows the extent to which, by this time, the sickeningly repetitive functions of the death drive had come to haunt all realms of colonial representation.

## NOTES

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1. The report is anonymous, but the author is probably George Hay, founder of the King Williams Town newspaper. *The Cape Mercury*, Wednesday, June 12, 1878 (no page numbering).

2. There are too many articles on the subject of colonial landscape to offer a full list here, but of recent pieces I would single out especially Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay* (1987), W.J.T. Mitchell's *Imperial Landscape* (1994), J.M. Coetzee's *White Writing* (1988), and my own work in Mitchell, ed. (1994).

3. For three characteristically picturesque travelers with an interest in this region, see Robert Wilmot's *A Cape Traveller's Diary* (1984[1856]), Thomas Pringle's *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* (1966[1835]), and, of course, Thomas Bowler.

4. Like all those who have gone before me, I am heavily indebted to Peires' monumental work on the Xhosa and the Eastern Cape. Other standard sources of reference have included Cobbing (1988), Crais (1992), Spicer (1978), Mostert (1992), and Stapleton (1994). My understanding of terrain and defense has also benefited tremendously from Colin Coetzee's privately published tour d' force *Forts of the Eastern Cape* (1995).

5. The subject of the Mfengu (an odd twentieth-century term meant to correct the nineteenth-century misnomer "Fingo") is exceedingly complicated. In general, the term may be taken to refer to refugee communities from amidst the Xhosa themselves (some of whom may have been displaced by what was effectively still British slaveraiding), work-

seekers from communities such as the Ngwane, the Hlubi and others. The term "Fingo" was thus a political characterization more than anything else, referring to resettled eastern Cape Africans loosely allied with the British who could be pressed into military service. For detailed information on this topic see Alan Webster, "Land Expropriation and Labour Extraction" (1991).

6. Here again there is a confusing array of terms and identity categories. The Ngqika were the western branch of the Rharhabe Xhosa (as opposed to the Gcaleka, originally associated with the Transkei). Rharhabe's direct descendant Ngqika, referred to as "Gaika" in the nineteenth century, ceded territory to the British in a move subsequently opposed by his sons. Maqoma, the elder "Right Hand" son of Ngqika effectively ruled as regent and was the chief opponent of the British until the main heir, Sandile, was installed as chief. For excellent surveys of this period see Stapleton and Mostert. The standard history of the Rharhabe is Peires' *The House of Phalo* (1981).

7. South Africa still has one of the richest living traditions of oral poetry, providing a significant resource for researchers interested in the symbolic meaning of locales for particular communities. Xhosa-speaking students of mine at the University of the Western Cape have given me tantalizing glimpses of this complex, transmitted history, and it is a topic that I am now beginning to pursue in my field work in the Stutterheim region. For an excellent overview of the Xhosa praise poetry tradition, see Opland's *Xhosa Oral Poetry* (1983).

8. *Imperial Blue Book* 1334 of 1851, G. Cyrus, Civil Commissioner of Albany, 15 August 1850, pp. 42–43, quoted in Peires' *The Dead Will Arise*, p. 7.

9. S.E.K. Mqhayi, *Ityala lama-wele*. I am deeply indebted to my friend and research assistant Khaya Matyobeni for this excellent translation.

10. Still by far the best commentary on this aspect of the eastern Cape wars is Peires' *The Dead Will Arise*, pages 1–44. In what follows, I have drawn extensively on some sources originally identified by Peires, and these have often pointed me to other promising manuscripts to be mined.

11. This notorious admission has intrigued most historians writing about the War of Mlanjeni. See, for example, Mostert 1992:1153 and Stapleton 1994:163.

12. Shula Marks provides a useful account of these episodes in "Rewriting South African History: Or the Hunt for Hintsa's Head" (1996). At the time of writing this article, the public hearings of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission are producing agonizing testimony by victims of apartheid violence, a number of whom still to this day search for missing bodies or body parts of loved ones.

13. Consider, for instance, Benjamin West's well-known historical representation of the death of

Wolfe, in which all Nature seems to conspire towards magnification of the dying general. In that work, the figures clustered around the prostrate hero are alert, distraught, leaning in to the death; a towering smoke cloud anticipates a pall or pyre, while the spread of national grief is signaled by the furled flag. Only the tattooed Mohawk figure reacts differently. Attentive, but somehow distant, consumed by a different understanding of death, he stares unmovingly at the dying commander.

14. See also Malvern van Wyk Smith's *Drummer Hodge: The Poetry of the Anglo-Boer War* (1978).

15. On 17 January 1879, regiments making up a total of twenty thousand Zulu warriors attacked an invading British force of about twelve hundred men. The subsequent devastation of British forces, in which very few were lucky to escape, sent shock waves around England.

16. Jane Taylor's subtle and exciting work on portraits of Sandile will add immeasurably to our understanding of representational logics in this period (1995).

17. My interest in the modernity of trauma has been stimulated by helpful discussions with Jonathan Elmer. For an equally illuminating discussion of trauma, war neuroses, and the history of psychoanalysis, see Ruth Leys' "Death Masks: Kardiner and Ferenczi on Psychic Trauma" (1996).

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